

BRANDING: A STRATEGY FOR MANNING AN ALL-VOLUNTEER ARMY

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USAWC CLASS OF 2008

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Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 15 MAR 2008	2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project	3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2007 to 00-00-2008			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Branding: A Strategy for Manning an All-Volunteer Army		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S) John Keeter		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College ,122 Forbes Ave.,Carlisle,PA,17013-5220		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT See attached					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 36	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel John M. Keeter
TITLE: Branding: A Strategy for Manning an All-Volunteer Army
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 12 March 2008 WORD COUNT: 5,983 PAGES: 35
KEY TERMS: Marketing, Recruiting, Retention, Campaign Design
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The Army needs to develop a long-term manning strategy to address recruiting, and retaining, an all-volunteer force in challenging environmental conditions. Current short-term tactics such as relaxing entry standards will have long-term consequences. The ability to man the Army and realize the vision of a "quality" force is challenged not only by the impacts of a protracted war on the attitudes of the youth, and their influencers, but also by the fact that the Army has not created an inspirational identity that could sway their propensity to consider service. This paper will assess current and projected challenges, explore the commitments and concerns of Generation Next, and recommend a strategy built on industry's branding process in order to position the Army for future recruiting success.

BRANDING: A STRATEGY FOR MANNING AN ALL-VOLUNTEER ARMY

Community leaders at all levels, not just the recruiters...have a responsibility to ask our young people to serve our country.

—Representative Ike Skelton¹

The Army can position itself for long-term manning success by adopting industry's branding process. Branding creates an emotional, inspirational connection with the marketplace, and ultimately advocacy.² The process—a long-term relationship approach compared to a short-term transactional approach—involves applying identity as a lens for all decisions driving marketing efforts³, creates a unity of effort to maximize a consistent message, and leverages advocacy to validate the promised experience.⁴

The Army needs to develop a strategy to proactively engage communities, reconnect with America's youth and build equity back into its brand of service.⁵ Increasing manning resources, particularly funding for incentives and recruiter end strength, can not be expected to continue indefinitely. If potential recruits continue to be less willing to serve, the Army risks the ability to field a quality force.

The United States Marine Corps (USMC) has adopted a branding approach to recruiting for many years; if adopted by the Army, it may be the key to maintaining a quality all-volunteer force during a protracted war. The goal of this paper is to propose a long-term strategy that positions the Army for manning success, now and in the future. To this end, the following research questions are addressed:

- What are the characteristics of the current youth, "Generation Next," that the Army can leverage to become more appealing to prospects and influencers?

- What are the environmental challenges that impact the Army's ability to man the force?
- How can the Army implement a branding strategy that favorably shapes the environment?
- What are the risks to successful strategy implementation, and how can they be mitigated?

Background

Senior military and government leaders are concerned about the Army's ability to man itself. In a speech given to the Brookings Institute think tank, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Casey, voices his concerns: "We are now in a position of having to sustain an all-volunteer force in a protracted confrontation for the first time since the Revolutionary War, and so we are in uncharted territory. We're measuring all of these things very carefully, but I gotta tell you, it's a dicey game."⁶

The President directed the Army to grow by 74,000; General Casey plans to do this by 2010, primarily through retention initiatives. He feels the Army can only recruit about 80,000 in the active force per year.⁷

In January of 2007, the Secretary of Defense announced that both the Marine Corps and Army would expand by the year 2012 to prevent them from being stretched too thin. The Army expects to reach an end-strength of 547,000 by 2010, yet is reluctant to increase the recruiting mission above the current 80,000 per year to avoid failure; the current recruiting environment is perceived as too challenging. Consequently, the Army's strategy is to rely on a retention-focus strategy to achieve their manning goals.⁸

The USMC was also directed to grow by an additional 27,000, and, unlike the Army, increased its annual recruiting goals last year by 2,300 to achieve this end. The Marine Corps' organizational structure is weighted more toward junior enlisted positions, resulting in a reliance on recruiting.

Even though the Army and Marine Corps met their Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 recruiting missions, the Army has struggled more to do so. An indication is the smaller percentage of the FY 2008 mission of new recruits waiting for the basic training date in the Future Soldier Training Program (FSTP), formerly known as the Delayed Entry Pool (DEP). Traditionally, a healthy cushion of recruits to flow into the training base during slow recruiting periods has historically ranged between 20% and 35%; this entry "savings account" for FY 2008 is only 9%, primarily due to the challenging recruiting environment. Recruiting month-to-month to meet manning requirements has risks, similar to living month-to-month on a pay check. Adverse environmental shifts could impact the Army's ability to meet its recruiting mission.⁹

As Clausewitz points out, the political and military leadership must understand what kind of war one is in before developing a strategy.¹⁰ Presently, the Army is in a "war for talent"¹¹ to maintain a quality force and requires an information campaign strategy to convince the youth of America, and their influencers, to serve. A better understanding of Generation Next will provide the foundation for strategy development to address these challenges.

Leveraging Generation Next Attributes To Improve Army Appeal

Generational research reveals motivations that shape the behavior of Generation Next and describes it by the following four qualities: "confidence, education-

mindfulness, tolerance on social issues, and community-centric.”¹² Their confidence is fueled by parental relationships and technology. They want to be rich and famous, and they expect education to be the means for financial success; additionally, tangible and intangible rewards for their merits at work are important. They appreciate innovation and expect to have choices and options.¹³

Generation Next is leading a new wave of addressing community problems and volunteer their time if they believe their efforts are making a difference. Their heroes are close and familiar; they are more likely to name a family member, teacher, or mentor as hero.¹⁴

Pew Research Center’s 2006 Generation Next survey illustrates their optimism, particularly in attaining a quality education, a high paying job, and bringing about social change; however, they perceive Generation X has always had financial security, especially in the ability to purchase a home, shown in figure 1 below.¹⁵

How is Life Better Today? (Based on 18-25 year-olds)				
<i>When it comes to...</i>	Young adults today have <u>it better</u>	Young adults 20 years ago <u>had it better</u>	(Vol.)	
	%	%	<u>Same</u> %	<u>DK</u> %
Getting a good education	84	12	2	2=100
Getting a high paying job	72	23	3	2=100
Having sexual freedom	66	25	4	5=100
Living in an exciting time	64	27	7	2=100
Bringing about social change	56	35	4	5=100
Enjoying financial security	47	44	4	5=100
Buying a house	31	62	3	4=100

Source: 2006 Gen Next survey

Figure 1. Generation Next Expectations Compared to Generation X

Generation Next is beginning to understand financial realities and the challenges of gaining financial security: paying off school loans, increasing housing and healthcare

costs, and accumulating credit card debt dampen financial independence.¹⁶ Parents, key influencers for Generation Next career decisions, are also concerned.

Parents of Generation Next, accused as “hovering”¹⁷ over their development, are now concerned about their children’s skills to develop financial independence. According to Demos, a think tank in New York, “A lot of parents don’t understand why their kids haven’t accomplished the traditional markers of adulthood that they did - buying a home, starting a family, living without debt.”¹⁸ Parents are also becoming concerned about their own retirement, particularly if their Generation Next children lack life skills needed for independence.

The implications for the Army are that it must maintain competitive tangible offerings, such as college tuition, pay, bonuses, and health benefits to address these expectations and concerns. College education access and funding remain an institutional commitment, even during deployments, and must be promoted by the Army. Additionally, unique offerings to address long-term financial security, such as the current home ownership fund pilot test, could potentially address both an influencer and Generation Next expectation.¹⁹

Self-expectations in the workplace are high for Generation Next, but are they realistic? An assessment by corporate America reveals they may not be prepared to enter today’s workforce.

Industry Assessment of Generation Next in the Workplace

Corporate America’s perspective of entry-level readiness reveals the following as critical capabilities required to be competitive in the global economy:

“professionalism/work ethic, teamwork/collaboration, and oral communications;

knowledge of foreign languages; health and wellness choices; and creativity/innovation.”²⁰ The Soldier experience delivers on all of these, especially with a renewed focus on foreign language development.²¹

High school graduates are adequate in three very important applied skills: “information technology application, diversity, and teamwork/ collaboration;” however, they have deficiencies in the following: “writing in English, mathematics, and reading comprehension; written communications and critical thinking/problem solving; and professionalism/work ethic.”²² College graduates show deficiencies in leadership.²³ U.S. chief executive officers are concerned, with over half reporting education and workforce preparedness as a “very important” or “most important” policy issue.²⁴

The Army, on the other hand, can view these challenges as an opportunity to demonstrate how becoming a Soldier provides these skills. The Army, as an institution founded on growing adaptive leaders, instills a warrior ethos and Army Values throughout the Soldier experience.

Current war commitments could be an opportunity to demonstrate the development of adaptive leadership skills for all Soldiers. This volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous environment creates conditions for leaders to develop unique adaptive leadership skills which are viewed by corporate America as critical to our nation’s success in the global marketplace. The challenge is promoting these unique skills and opportunities effectively in today’s environment, while balancing the risk of turning prospects away due to the dangers of combat. A closer examination of the environment will provide insights into why a knowledge gap exists between America and her Army.

Environmental Challenges Impacting Army Manning

Since one can view the current manning challenge as an information campaign to convince America's youth to serve, the application of military campaign planning provides a coherent approach. An environmental analysis applies joint doctrine's operational design elements to understand the threats around the consideration or decision to join the Army through the following dimensions: Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, and Infrastructure/Influencers (PMESII). This systems analysis provides additional insights into a center of gravity to focus Army efforts.²⁵

Political Environmental Challenges

Political dimensions include national and Army policies that impact recruiting and retention. Fighting two protracted wars negatively affects the willingness of youth and their influencers to consider or recommend serving.

Generation Next support for the use of military force in Iraq has dropped from approximately 70% in 2003 to 26% in 2006.²⁶ Even though the dissatisfaction is targeted toward the political decision and current handling of the war in Iraq, and not toward the military, it does affect the willingness of youth and their influencers to consider or recommend serving.

Youth claiming they definitely or probably will serve in the military has declined from 25% in 1985 to 9% in 2007. Parents' willingness to recommend service has dropped from 40% in 2003 to 20% in 2007.²⁷

As a result, the Army has adopted short-term demand-side policies, such as increasing the new recruit maximum age to 42, increasing its medical and moral waivers, and allowing more recruits without high school degrees—currently at 79%

below the Department of Defense (DoD) minimum 90% goal;²⁸ arguably, these short-term decisions will have potential long-term consequences for the Army, such as discounting the perceived value or image associated with the Soldier experience and reducing future retention rates.

Military Environmental Challenges

Serving as a Soldier is not perceived as inspirational to America's youth; it has an "ordinary" image and is considered a last resort for a career choice. Compared to other services, youth have an image of the Army as less elite, low tech and dangerous. However, they also think the Army best represents society, has tradition, demonstrates teamwork, and is more likely to offer money for college than other choices.²⁹

Attitudes are also shaped by communicating with veterans and those currently serving. Unfortunately, our society is losing its representation of key grass root military veteran advocates.³⁰ These drops have serious strategic communication implications that contribute to the current Army service knowledge gap. Since 2004, the Army has increased its recruiter strength from 6,000 for an accession mission of 72,000 to approximately 8,200 for an accession mission of 80,000. These additional recruiters, drawn primarily from the warfighting operational Army, is the primary means to increase the Soldier footprint and provide dialogue opportunities with America's youth to tell the Army story to America.³¹ Advocacy from all Soldiers is another communication source that has potential leverage.

According to the annual survey given to new Army recruits from FY 2002 through FY 2006, there were numerous barriers they overcame prior to enlisting: "Get everything that was promised, military lifestyle, other career interests, long commitment,

and family obligations.”³² These findings imply that new recruits may not totally trust the Army will deliver on their promises. This could imply a short-term, transactional-focus recruiting culture to meet its recruiting mission.³³ These barriers also indicate a potential lack of understanding of the Army lifestyle—during deployments and home station, its commitment to families, and the potential growth opportunities. One cannot expect advertisements to tell this part of the Army story; currently serving Soldiers and Army alumni need to communicate to America’s youth and their influencers.

Clearly, the protracted war is influencing Generation Next attitudes; however, another contributor is a lack of knowledge of what it means to be a Soldier. The economy also impacts the decision to join as it dictates the number of post high school options available.

Economic Environmental Challenges

According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, “65.8 percent of high school graduates from the class of 2006 were enrolled in colleges or universities...Since 2001, the college enrollment rate for recent high school graduates has been trending upward.”³⁴ Youth unemployment has remained steady at approximately 11% since 2004.³⁵

The Army’s competitive advantage used to be the Army College Fund; however, college offerings are now a common benefit. To remain competitive, the Army must develop attractive college incentives, yet also look for unique incentives relevant to Generation Next, addressing their financial security concerns.

Social/Cultural Environmental Challenges

Poor physical fitness and high school drop out rates are key social challenges limiting the qualified prospect pool for military service. High school diploma attainment is also a challenge, where one in four high school freshmen will not graduate in 4 years.³⁶ This graduation rates are worse for minorities: 56% for African Americans and 52% for Hispanics.³⁷

In the most recent analysis of the youth market by the U.S. Army Accessions Command G-2, only 27% (8.5 million) of the current 31.5 million 17-24 year olds qualify for military service.³⁸ For those who do not qualify, the majority is due to weight, medical, moral, and dependent reasons (55%); the next highest disqualifiers are education and aptitude (44%).³⁹ Dr. Curtis Gilroy from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness (OSD PR), highlights the challenge and the retention-focus policy: "We have a sinking pool of qualified candidates...That's one of the reasons why we're focusing on the retention. We have to retain more soldiers if we're going to grow the Army [in full] by 65,000."⁴⁰ The Army could take this challenge on, shape conditions for the future, and improve its image in the process.

Community outreach is very important to Generation Next. In a study conducted for the Army in 2005, when asked, "How much each item would influence your overall impressions of the Army as an initial career option if you knew the Army used that source?," Table 1 shows the net results of those that had strong positive impressions minus those that had strong negative impressions if the Army was involved in selected activities, with net percentages 20% or higher considered as significant. This research reveals that programs that impact the community in a meaningful way, such as high school education tutorship and physical fitness, will not only improve the general

market's impressions and service consideration, but also minority groups, which are becoming increasingly difficult to recruit.⁴¹

Net Impact (% Top Box - % Bottom Box)	General Market	African American	Hispanic
Community service (Toys for Tots, Salvation Army, Make a Wish)	22.9	24.4	26.9
Stay in school youth and high school tutorship program	14.8	21.8	20.5
If you heard about testimonials about successful community persons who previously served in the Army	9.8	12.5	8.2
Youth Physical Fitness and sports sponsorship	9.7	14.0	21.6
NHRA (National Hot Rod Association) Dragster sponsorship	-6.5	-1.8	-4.6
NASCAR sponsorship	-7.1	-4.6	-2.3
Rodeo organization sponsorship	-8.7	-6.7	-6.2
Hunting organization sponsorship	-10.0	-11.3	-4.7

Table 1. Impressions of the Army by Potential Sponsorships

Senior Army policy makers should consider developing programs and prioritize resources into community partnerships, similar to the USMC Toys for Tots and National Youth Physical Fitness Program.⁴² The Army can develop an inspirational identity through community involvement, particularly if it demonstrates the values of becoming a Soldier in a meaningful, personal way.

Information Environmental Challenges

Mass communications are not as effective with Generation Next because they multi-task on multiple communication channels. A national survey of marketing professionals from the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) found “78 percent of these marketers feel the potency of their television advertising has declined in the last two years.”⁴³ There is evidence current Army advertising efforts are not breaking through the media clutter, as shown through low advertising and slogan recall (23% and

17% respectfully); in comparison, the Marine Corps recall is extremely high, 75% and 61% respectfully, with a media budget significantly lower than the Army's.⁴⁴ This phenomenon is occurring even with a rise in Army media spending over the past few years.⁴⁵ What is Marine Corps doing differently than the Army to get its message out? The Marine Corps culture supports the branding concepts that enhance its image within our society. Currently, the Army does not have a coherent, unified effort to leverage Soldier advocacy to support recruiting as part of its culture.

Generation Next also validates decisions by using multiple sources, especially the Internet.⁴⁶ Marketers seek to understand this behavior, determine the most influential communication channels impacting the decisionmaking process, and develop strategies that reinforce success. According to the USAAC's Fiscal Year 2006 New Recruit Survey, the top five information channels valued the most in priority order are Army recruiters, GoArmy.com, Internet information, information from a friend who enlisted, and TV advertisements.⁴⁷ To build a convincing brand image, message consistency across these communication channels must occur.

The final environmental dimension is Influencers. Generation Next seeks them out for most major decisions, particularly career choices.

Infrastructure/ Influencer Support Environmental Challenges

Influencer polls provide insights into why they are less likely to recommend service in the following perceptions of the Army: "ordinary, accepts anybody, last resort as a career choice, and most exposure to being killed/wounded."⁴⁸ The Army must overcome these negative perceptions. It must convince and demonstrate that the Army is not a

last resort for a career choice, yet an opportunity to develop skills leading to independence like no other institution.

Centers of Gravity for Strategy Development

These generational and environmental analyses provide insights into the Army's, and Generation Next's, critical capabilities and vulnerabilities and ultimately will identify centers of gravity—a "source of moral or physical strength, power, and resistance."⁴⁹ Generation Next seeks to develop capabilities through college, state-of-the-art technology, community involvement, and making a difference early. Vulnerabilities of Generation Next are work ethos, financial security, service qualification (physical, mental, moral), and leadership skills. This leads to a personal development center of gravity, with tangible and intangible benefit dimensions. The "Army Strong" advertising campaign address this by offering a unique Army strength; however, an advertising campaign can only expect to illuminate existing positive perceptions. Direct Soldier communications is the most effective means to positively impact the core Soldier image, as they provide the validation Generation Next seeks.

The Army must protect its current robust recruiting force as its primary capability for telling the Army story to America's youth and their influencers in order to meet current recruiting goals. Even with a very capable advertising budget of 270 million dollars per year⁵⁰ and a state-of-the-art website in goarmy.com, it is not enough to address the critical vulnerability of not establishing an inspirational image with Generation Next; increasing the dialogue between Soldiers and their communities is the center of gravity for swaying perceptions in today's environment. Corporate America

applies branding principles to withstand environmental shifts; the Army can do this as well.⁵¹

Implementing an Army Branding Strategy

Branding Definition

A brand name is defined by Webster's as "a reputation of value with a loyal following."⁵² To achieve this reputation, the branding process involves identifying one's differentiating identity, creating consistent messages from all communication sources, and delivering on promises. The identity is the lens that drives all marketing activities. Message consistency from all communication sources develops the image one strives for in the minds of the market. Delivery of promises builds credibility and the ultimate output of the branding process: advocacy.⁵³

The following are examples of well-known brands and their identity: Volvo (safety); FedEx (overnight); Kodak (memories); Maytag (dependability); and Porsche (speed). Branding applies to businesses, religion, universities, congressmen, and even the military.⁵⁴ The United States Marine Corps successfully applies the branding concepts to enhance its image within our society.

U.S. Marine Corps Branding Applications

Generation Next associates the Marines' identity as "the most elite Service."⁵⁵ Its reputation of value has been nurtured over time because of the following: their clear vision of what they stand for as an institution; consistent and aligned messages externally from advertising and validated from one-on-one conversations with Marines in

the marketplace; and most importantly leveraging recruiting efforts through their advocacy culture, “once a Marine, always a Marine.”

Non-profit organizations such as The Marine Corps Toys for Tots Foundation—supported by the Marine Corps Reserves—along with the United States Marines Youth Foundation’s National Youth Physical Fitness Program, enhance the Marine image by providing opportunities to demonstrate who they are while impacting local communities in a positive way. This synergy between associations with community involvement and marketing communications enhances the Marine Corps’ overall communication effectiveness and is more efficient, resulting in very high advertising recall figures—75% compared to the Army’s 23%—with a budget that is 15% of the Army’s in comparison.⁵⁶

Campaign Plan Approach to Army-wide Branding Strategy

The Army and Soldier brand identity is “Strength.” A community engagement policy guides a strategy that adopts an Army-wide, unity of effort approach to shape the environment in a coherent, unified way. Joint doctrine’s campaign design frames an approach to implement this proposed strategy.

Identifying the desired end state is the first step as it drives the development of objectives, lines of operations, effects, and measures of effectiveness towards end state achievement.⁵⁷ Figure 2 below provides a visual concept of a proposed Army-wide strategy to engage America’s communities to create an emotional bond, while shaping the environment that supports future Army manning efforts.

The goal is to create the following end state conditions for the Army: an enduring capability to meet the Nation’s quality force needs; a reputation of having unique skills, education, work ethos, and leadership experiences valued by prospects, influencers,

and community leaders; and the Soldier's identity as being associated with "Strength of the Nation."⁵⁸ These conditions guard against a short-term, transactional approach to meet short-term manning requirements; they leverage industry's branding process that seeks to establish long-term "profitable" conditions.

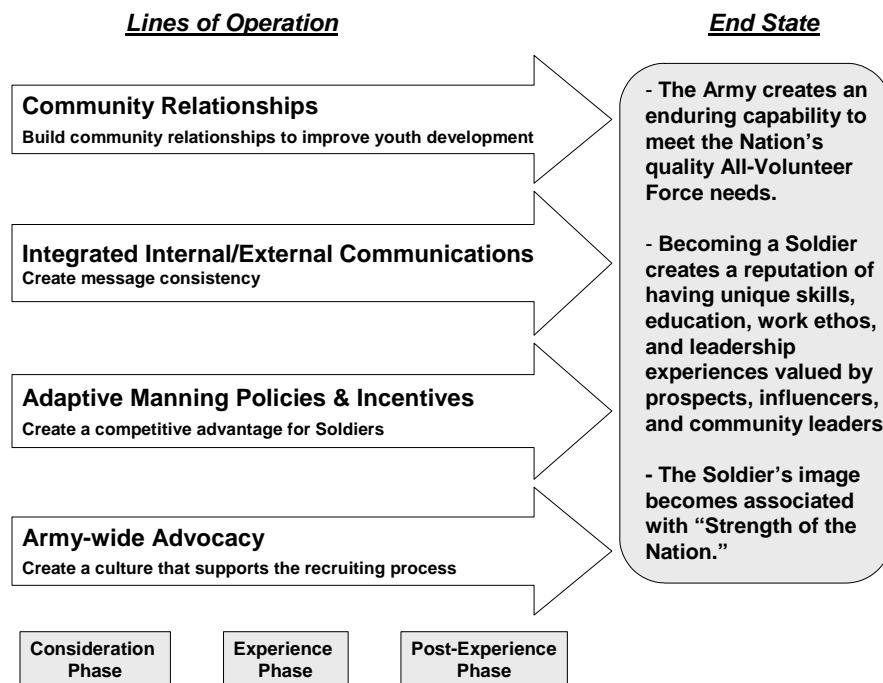


Figure 2. Army-wide Branding Campaign Strategy

The lines of operation address the environmental and generational centers of gravity dimensions that threaten the decisions to join the Army, flowing through the following phases: Army consideration, Army experience, and post Army experience.⁵⁹

Build Community Relationships to Develop America's Youth

The main effort is the first line of operation, "Community Relationships," with an objective to improve youth physical fitness and educational development. One of the key tasks is for the Army to sponsor programs that encourage youth physical fitness and educational development. The Army can build on the US Marines Youth

Foundation's Youth Physical Fitness Program, a non-profit organization with Congressional support. The goal of this K-12 program is to teach "fitness for life" as well as a drug-free lifestyle. High school aged participants conduct regional and state physical fitness competitions with other schools.⁶⁰ The Marine Corps League, a veteran's organization with 43,000 members nationwide, administers this program.⁶¹

It is feasible for the Army to create a similar organization, or leverage existing ones such as the Association of the United States Army (AUSA). The larger size of the Army's active and reserve component footprint in local communities offers tremendous potential, with more veterans, recruiters, Department of the (DA) civilians, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, institutional and operational bases than any of the services. Additionally, offering high school tutorship partnerships with these Soldiers or DA civilians not only provides a "win-win" solution for key influencers—educators and parents—but also allows an opportunity to demonstrate the Army's commitment to developing mentally, physically, and emotionally strong Soldiers. An Army culture not comfortable engaging communities in this personal way risks successful program implementation.

The Army's proud heritage of selfless service to the nation, and not questioning orders when given, produces a culture of quiet professionals: an attitude that makes talking about the benefits of becoming a Soldier in the marketplace unnatural.⁶² Senior Army leaders may need to manage this aspect of the culture, especially as environmental conditions create a knowledge gap between America and her Army.

The Army culture shapes behaviors based on the Warrior Ethos, Army Values, and adaptive leadership. These attributes are institutionalized by embedding these

norms into Soldier performance ratings; generally, behavior is shaped by what is viewed as important, and measured, by leadership.⁶³ For community outreach behavior to be a cultural norm, it will require a similar emphasis from leadership to mitigate the risk, which leads to the second key task.

The second key task is to institutionalize community outreach, making this a task in unit and leadership performance evaluations. Senior leaders are taking the first step to change the culture through their own actions, proactively seeking out community outreach and speaking engagements;⁶⁴ however, an Army-wide approach, leveraging all Soldiers, will have more of a sustaining effect on shaping attitudes and behaviors. Simply supporting existing programs is a first step.

The Army has several existing outreach programs, such as the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs' (OCPA) Operation Tribute to Freedom, which coordinates speaking engagements for Soldiers returning from deployments.⁶⁵ Combatant Command's public affairs offices (PAOs) also create communication kits for Soldiers to use for outreach opportunities during mid-tour breaks. The Combined Forces Command Afghanistan (CFC-A) PAO created a video and slide presentation showing servicemen and women making a difference through provincial reconstruction team efforts, with a two-day leave credit incentive for those choosing to speak in their communities during their mid-tour break.⁶⁶ These programs offer two key benefits for the Army: Soldiers telling their story provides credibility, especially if community events are covered by third-party media; Soldiers also benefit by receiving local community appreciation for their service.

Additionally, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Training (OASA (ALT)), sponsors a middle-school science competition

known as “eCYBERMISSION.”⁶⁷ This is a web-based science, math and technology competition for 6th through 9th grade teams, leveraging active and reserve component servicemen, as well as DoD civilians as volunteer mentors for these teams. The teams propose solutions to real problems in local communities. This program communicates the military’s commitment to education, especially in math and sciences.

Another proactive community engagement program is the U.S. Army Accessions Command’s (USAAC) “Grassroots Training and Outreach Project” pilot program in Dallas, Texas. The intent of the program is to leverage community leaders as advocates for Army and assist communicating the value of being a Soldier. This is a proactive public relations approach to get Army messages out in the marketplace from trusted community leaders. Since March of 2007, 20 media engagements produced 65 million media impressions.⁶⁸

One of the expected effects is the enhancement of a Soldier’s image due to the association with leading efforts to improve youth fitness and high school dropout problem; proactive public relations provide the third person validation to reinforce this message. The Army, and DoD, has ongoing youth and influencer polls that measure the effectiveness (MoE) in developing the Soldier’s image as “strong.”⁶⁹ A measure of performance (MoP) would be an increase or decrease of Soldiers supporting existing outreach programs.

Another effect is increasing prospect propensity to serve in the Army, as well as their Influencers recommending service, measured again by Army and DoD youth and influencer quarterly polls.

Integrate Internal and External Communications to Create Message Consistency

The second line of operation is to integrate external and internal communications, with the objective to develop a consistent message across all communication channels. Currently, the Army's external communications are split primarily between the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (ASA-MRA) and OCPA. The ASA-MRA oversees the marketing strategy and communications to support recruiting, along with USAAC; OCPA communicates Soldier stories through news media outlets as well as oversight of community outreach events. OCPA also oversees internal communications. As members of the Executive Office of HQDA (EOH), the ASA-MRA and OCPA report directly to the Secretary of the Army and are resourced separately for their missions.⁷⁰

If the Army's identity is strength, this message is reinforced when advertising, Army PAO stories, and comments from Soldiers align to this central theme. Aligning communications that show how Soldiers are making a difference in communities, not only locally in America, but also in Iraq and Afghanistan, supports this strength identity, and generational need. This would require joint strategic planning between the ASA-MRA and OCPA, with support from USAAC regarding operational execution. Each organization is involved in community outreach; however, there is no unity of command, especially in resource decisions. Synergies between the powerful reach capabilities of external marketing communications, coupled by the powerful impact of Soldiers telling the Army story, achieves the maximum communication effect.

One of the effects is reinforcing the Soldier "strength" image from Generation Next and their influencers, measured by quarterly perception polls or annual image and equity quantitative research from market research professionals. Another measure of

effectiveness is general market recall of strategic themes of Soldier strength dimensions—such as values, warrior ethos, adaptive leaders— measured by quarterly advertising tracking polls by the ASA-MRA and DoD.

Adaptive Manning Policies that Create a Competitive Advantage for Soldiers

The third line of operation is developing adaptive manning policies in order to create a competitive advantage for Soldiers. The tasks include developing pilot programs to test unique tangible offerings as well manning policies that facilitate tailoring the Army experience and incentive packages.

The Army is making strides to develop creative incentives, such as the Army Advantage Fund (AAF) Pilot program. The AAF pilot offers up to \$40,000 for active Army recruits and \$20,000 for Reserve recruits for equity in a home or small business.⁷¹ However, the process for implementing creative incentives is slow. The idea was tested for market appeal by the ASA-MRA and USAAC in December of 2004, selected as one of three new incentives by the secretary of the Army to test as part of the 2006 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA),⁷² requested for FY 2007 Congressional support on 15 February 2007 by the Army G-1,⁷³ and announced on 24 January 2008 that the pilot program was implemented.⁷⁴ This process needs streamlining so that unique offerings are provided, and tested, at a faster rate, illustrating the Army's adaptive capabilities to the marketplace.

Since leveraging technology to customize experiences is a Generation Next expectation, the implication for the Army is that it may need to develop a discrete choice capability in recruiting and retention. This would allow prospects and Soldiers to customize their Army experience and financial incentives. Tailoring enlistment packages

may also create efficiencies, avoiding economic rent, or paying for financial incentives when they are not needed to influence the enlistment decision.⁷⁵

Generational Next Soldiers expect individual growth opportunities outside of Army experience. Examples of policies to fulfill this need, as well as the Army's, may include working with community leaders (mayors, waste management, and police departments) and language training prior to deployments, sabbaticals with higher education, training with industry, and think tank partnerships. This type of community interaction creates Soldier dialogue opportunities.

The desired effect is the perception that the Army experience and tangible incentives are valued as relevant and competitive. The ultimate measure of effectiveness is recruiting and retention goals are met. The measure of performance is the rate of relevant, unique incentives and policies offered to Generation Next. The Army must maintain a commitment to market research to stay abreast of the dynamic generational commitments and concerns to ensure their offerings are relevant.

Army-wide Advocacy: Creating a Culture that Supports Recruiting

The objective is to create a culture, similar to the Marine Corps, where Soldiers understand their role and proactively support the recruiting process. The Army currently offers several volunteer programs such as the Hometown Recruiter Assistant Program (HRAP), Special Recruiter Assistant Program (SRAP), and the Army Referral System for the Sergeant Major of the Army Recruiting Team (ARS SMART).⁷⁶

HRAP allows recently graduated Soldiers from basic training to return to their hometown, for up to 14 days, supporting local Army recruiting efforts. SRAP allows returning Soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom

(OEF) to spend up to 14 days in their hometown, with reimbursable traveling costs, to help tell their deployment story. Both HRAP and SRAP participants may qualify for a referral bonus under the ARS SMART program. The ARS SMART program offers up to \$2,000 to “Soldiers, USMA Cadets, ROTC Contracted Cadets, Future Soldiers, Army component retirees and Department of the Army Civilians may receive a Referral Bonus for referring anyone, except immediate family members, if those referrals result in an enlistment into the Army or Army Reserve.”⁷⁷

These voluntary programs are a step in the right direction to change the Army culture, but only if these programs are supported by local unit leadership. A potential risk is unit leadership not supporting this type of Soldier involvement, either due to cultural pulls to keep Soldiers with their unit or lack of understanding the importance of reaching out to communities. Institutionalizing community outreach is a means to mitigate this risk, where leadership encourages involvement when it does not conflict with unit readiness.

Other evolving programs is to leverage goarmy.com where prospects can “Ask a Soldier” questions regarding the Army life.⁷⁸ This may be the least obtrusive way to maximize Army-wide involvement by leveraging the Internet.

Ultimately, the desired effect is Soldiers sincerely recommend serving. A measure of performance is the increase or decrease in prospect referrals from Soldiers, Alumni, and DA civilians. Advocacy in the Army is measured by the Army G-1’s Army Research Institute (ARI) biannual Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP). For those currently serving, an Army officer’s likelihood to recommend service to prospects has dropped from 60% in 2003 to 50% in 2007. Army enlisted likelihood to recommend

service has dropped from 53% in 2003 to 43% in 2007.⁷⁹ Even though advocacy from currently serving Soldiers is trending downward, a significant number of currently serving and veteran Army advocates still exist as potential to leverage.

Another generational attribute the Army can potentially leverage is Generation Next's need for involvement.⁸⁰ If given the mission to interact with the community to help with recruiting efforts, young Soldiers will step up and do it. The "mission focus" Army culture could be leveraged this way; senior Army leadership would have to employ embedded and reinforcing mechanisms to encourage outreach behavior, which is unnatural to the Army culture. Additionally, senior leadership must be willing to accept risk with Soldiers interacting with the media. The potential for success, however, is greater than the risk potential.

Conclusion

If potential recruits continue to be less willing to serve, the Army risks the enduring ability to field a quality force. An Army-wide community engagement policy which leverages advocacy provides the strategic framework for shaping the recruiting environment to reduce this risk. Branding is a strategy that leverages the strength of the Army—its people— and a unity-of-effort communication approach to enhance its image and reputation.

This strategy is feasible because a holistic, integrated, institution-wide approach is working with the United States Marine Corps. The Army has an even greater capacity to engage America's community in a relevant, meaningful way. Risks of Soldier community engagements are mitigated by leveraging Army public affairs programs and expertise.

This holistic, Army-wide strategy is suitable as it achieves the desired effect of shaping the environment to convince America's youth to serve; the status quo reliance on advertising alone is not enough. The Marines have proven that this holistic brand approach is not only effective, but also efficient.

Army culture dictates acceptability and risks overcoming this strategy if not managed. Senior Army leadership must not only continue to shape the culture by leading the effort to engage in community dialogues, but also employ embedding mechanisms to encourage this behavior at the local unit level. It will take time for community outreach to become an "acceptable" cultural norm once institutionalized. Costs are also acceptable since the primary resource is time.

If given the Army-wide mission to engage communities, adaptive Soldiers and leaders will step up, meet this challenge, and win the information campaign that shapes the environment that is conducive to manning a quality all-volunteer force; it is the Soldier's duty to do so.

Endnotes

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²⁹ Shawn Buck and Joseph Baird, “Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield of the Environment,” briefing slides with scripted commentary, Fort Knox, US Army Accessions Command G2, 26 September 2007, 35. This market intelligence analysis is a working product, combining both primary and secondary market research studies. This briefing provides a summary of the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of American youth in order to provide actionable intelligence for USAAC.

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³⁴ "College Enrollment And Work Activity Of 2006 High School Graduates," *News: Department of Labor Statistics*, 26 April 2007; available from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/hsgec.pdf>; Internet; accessed 12 January 2008.

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³⁶ Buck and Baird, 52. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) projects adult (ages 18 to 34) overweight/obesity rates, defined as a body-mass index (BMI) above 25, will increase from 47% in 2002 to 54% in 2008. Additionally, lack of physical activity, defined as adult (ages 18 to 44) inactivity rates during leisure time, increased from 32% in 2002 to 52% in 2005.

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